

SUFI MYSTICISM TO THE FORMATION OF SACRED ARCHITECTURAL REALISM

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ABSTRACT

Sufism is an esoteric and spiritual dimension of Islam and essential for its mystical facet and spirituality. According to their needs, every religion or sects built their religious centers with different architectural styles and programs. For the Sufis, their religious center is known as Khanqahs. Khanqahs are the religious center for the seekers to be guided according to the sufi preaching. There are 200 million followers that belong to the Barelvi movement, which followed the Sunni Hanafi School of Jurisprudence in South Asia. The majority of Muslims in India and Pakistan are Barelvis. In Pakistan, Sufi architecture is now bound in Sunni Barelvi, as they are the devotees. Most of the people go to the shrines to get the blessing from Sufi saints. The ambiance of Khanqahs is diminishing and its architecture is now confined in some rooms, halls, or a house, mostly known as Idaras or madrasas. Khanqah was an independent religious building that contains self-sufficient activities for this pattern of life which includes hostels for the seekers, meeting spaces, library, socialization space, a madrasah or a school, mosque which is one of the essential elements, with all other services and architectural elements that helps in experiencing the spiritual essence to find a better way of life through enlightenment, transcendence, and a personal relationship with absolute. Sufi architecture should manifest Sufi Culture based on Sufis's needs and requirements and their devotees.

The research understands the difference in shrine, Khanqahs and idaras or madrasas and the style and architectural meaning of Sufi centers are fading. Sufi mysticism has deeply influenced the formation of sacred architectural realism by infusing spiritual and metaphysical principles into architectural design, creating spaces that transcend mere physicality to embody divine unity and spiritual experience. Rooted in the mystical branch of Islam, Sufism emphasizes the inward search for God and the unity of all existence (Tawhid), which is reflected architecturally through intricate geometric patterns, calligraphy, and the symbolic use of light and space.

Sufi architecture manifests as a harmonious blend of form and spiritual function, where elements like domes and arches symbolize the heavens and gateways to the divine, encouraging contemplation and connection with the sacred. The use of light and shadow is pivotal, representing divine presence and wisdom, and creating an ethereal atmosphere that invites introspection and spiritual awakening. Geometric designs, often based on sacred geometry, express the infinite nature of creation and the interconnectedness of all things, embodying the Sufi ideal of unity in diversity.

Historically, this mystical influence is evident in Moorish, Ottoman, and Indian Sufi architectural landmarks, such as the Alhambra, the Süleymaniye Mosque, and Kashmir's Khanqahs, where architecture serves both as a sanctuary for the body and a spiritual refuge for the soul. These structures integrate aesthetic beauty with metaphysical meaning, using ornamental motifs, calligraphy of Quranic verses and Sufi poetry, and spatial organization to foster a transcendent environment conducive to meditation and divine communion.

Key words: Sufism, Mysticism, mystical Symbolism Spirituality, Khanqah, Madrasa.

INTRODUCTION

Islam is one of the largest religions in the world, and it is divided into many sects. Sufism is a mystical and ascetic form of Islam and essential concerning its mystical facet. The Sufis believe in the philosophy and practices that the main objective is to create direct communication between God and Man (Bilqies, 2014). During the Prophet's life and after His life, His companion was known as Sahaba and it is the highest rank after Prophet. *Tabiun* is the one who received religious education from *Sahaba*, who are followers of the companion of the Prophet. After *Tabiun*, *al-tabiin* was, the followers of *Tabiun* who received religious training from the companions followers. After *Tabiun*, who devoted their lives for the religious studies known as *Zahid* and *Abid*, "the pious servant of Allah" (Bilqies, 2014). It only concerns the succeeding generations that one comes across the term Sufi. Sufi's first titles were given to Shaykh-Abu-Hashim Kufi (d. 776) (Khanum, 2006). The Sufis Ideology and practices are purely based upon the Quran, hadith and Sunnah and precedents from Prophet and His companions' life. There is three levels of faith in Sufism, Islam, Iman and Ihsan . The first two components explain the act of belief and accepting **Allah as One and only God, His angels, His messengers, His books, and the Last Day Of judgment. While the third and the essential aspect is Ihsan** (doing what is beautiful), which focuses on the human (Rahman, December, 2014).

Zikr is the concept in Sufism, which means God's remembrance is interpreted in different meditative techniques. This becomes one of the essential elements of Sufism, as it systemized traditionally. *Zikr* is juxtaposed with *Fikr* which means thinking that lead path towards knowledge. By the 12th century, Sufism practices included specific meditative techniques, and its followers practiced breathing controls and the repetition of different holy words. The concentration technique involving high intensity and sharply focused self-examination. After the 12th century, *Dhikr*'s form evolved in different regions due to traveling to spread Islam's message, as Sufis believed in adopting the native languages and their culture and involved themselves in those communities and spread the message of Islam in their languages. For example, Baba Farid was well known Sufi in the sub-continent and intellectual in the language of Persian and Arabic; when he came to Punjab (as there was no Punjab at that time, it was Ajhodhan now called Pakpattan), he could easily continue his Message in both languages, but instead of Persian and Arabic, he preferred native language that is Punjabi instead of Persian or Arabic (Abdul Qadir Mushtaq, 2019). He did the *Zikr* in *Qawwali* as music is an essential Hindu religion component by embracing their culture. Same as in Turkish culture, they adopt Sufi whirling.

BELONG TO SUFISM

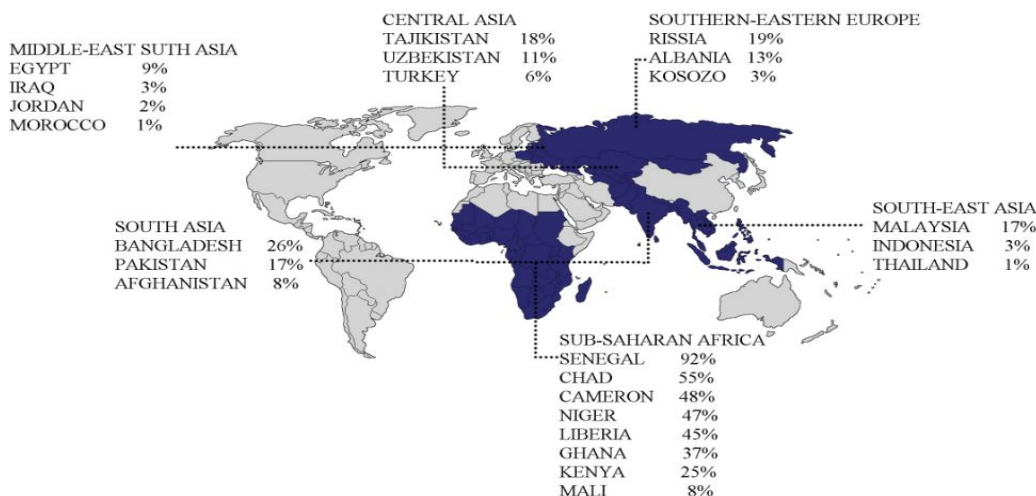


Figure 1 Population of Sufis around the world

Source: (Luis Lugo, 2012)

Illustration by: Author

Pakistan is acknowledged as a culturally rich country and the major factors that enhance its cultures and traditions are Sufism, shrines and their believers. Many Sufis came from different regions like Iran, Afghanistan, etc¹. to spread Islam in the subcontinent. They built their own homes which included preaching areas, a mosque and a place for the travellers who came to the place for guidance known as Hujra or Khanqah of the respective Saint. Later on, these became shrines, burial places of the Sufi that hold a different level of values and norms derived from function and occupancy (GHAFOOR, April, 2010). Shrines are the Burial places of the Sufis, in shrines Khanqahs Architecture plays an important role and a metaphor for the Sufis and their believers' spirituality and holiness. The shrines architecture are the primary focus for the devotees; they developed an attachment with relics, shrine after the Sufis' death. The economics of shrines works on the charities or donations given by the devotees or believers. According to Ghafoor 2010, the evolution started from the shrine and developed in multifunctional complex. The shrine of Hazrat Ali Hajvery from a hujra or Khanqah; due to increased numbers of believers, the shrine is converted into a complex, as shown in figure 2. Ali Hajvery complex has all the functions of a Khanqah in it, like a library, madrasa, prayer hall, conference hall, shops, etc. (GHAFOOR, April, 2010).

I. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

To generate extensive research on the Architectural significance of Khanqahs, a thorough and qualitative analysis was carried out to observe the spatial design of the Khanqahs in Lahore. Mostly secondary data such as interviews, literature reviews, and questionnaire surveys were incorporated to recover the Khanqahs. The research's scope is to understand the difference between shrines, Khanqahs and today Idaras (Sufi religious centers). As a direct approach, a comprehensive and detailed technical design solution is provided as a standard Khanqahs design adopted by various scholars that can be used as an example in Lahore and other cities. The resulting proposal was generated as a design strategy for the Lahore site's proposed design on

Karbath village, situated at Bedian road (outskirts of Lahore), as a reference study.

Research Methodology for the Study on Sufi Mysticism and Sacred Architectural Realism

Adopt an ontological hermeneutic approach to explore the metaphysical and spiritual dimensions of Sufi mysticism in architecture, focusing on the convergence of visible (zāhir) and unseen (bātin) elements. Use phenomenological inquiry to understand lived spiritual experiences within architectural spaces, emphasizing the role of light, geometry, and symbolism.

II. MATERIAL AND METHODS

Literature review and textual analysis: Examine classical and contemporary texts on Sufism, Islamic sacred architecture, Quranic verses, and Sufi poetry to identify spiritual principles reflected in architectural forms. Select key architectural examples influenced by Sufi mysticism such as the Alhambra, Süleymaniye Mosque, and Kashmir's Khanqahs to analyze their design elements, symbolism, and spatial organization. Engage in design practice or collaborative workshops to experience and interpret the spiritual impact of architectural elements, integrating creative and spiritual practices. Employ mixed methods combining qualitative analysis (hermeneutics, phenomenology) with architectural analysis (geometry, light, spatial configuration). Use content analysis for interpreting symbolic motifs, calligraphy, and geometric patterns as carriers of metaphysical meaning. Apply comparative analysis to correlate architectural features with Sufi spiritual concepts like Tawhid (unity), divine presence, and the spiritual heart (qalb).

Internal factors: spiritual intentions, mystical symbolism, and metaphysical concepts in design.

External factors: cultural, historical, and political contexts influencing Sufi architectural expressions. A comprehensive understanding of how Sufi mysticism shapes sacred architectural realism by blending material form with spiritual function. Guidelines or a framework for architects to integrate Sufi spiritual principles into contemporary sacred architecture, fostering spaces that evoke divine unity and spiritual experience. This methodology aligns with scholarly approaches that

¹ The origin of Chishti order was Afghanistan in the middle of 12th century, Moinuddin chishti introduced the Chishti order in the Punjab province of subcontinent specifically in Lahore and Ajmer. The origin of

Suhharwardi order was Iraq in the late 12th century and was introduced by Baha-ud din Zakariya and Jalaluddin Surkhposh Bukhari who made Multan and Uch the center of their activities respectively. (Omer M. , 2014)

bridge spiritual practice and architectural creativity, ensuring a holistic investigation into the sacred realism inspired by Sufi mysticism.

III. RESULTS AND FINDINGS:

3.1: Sufi's Architecture evolution from Mosques to Khanqahs

The first mosque is the Prophet's house, where people do not gather only for prayers but also for religious, social, political and economic discussions. This mosque culture was later on carried by *Sahābah* and so on. Mosque, as an institution functioned as an inclusive community development center, which is sufficient for early Sufi to educate others in the mosque, so there is no need for separate Sufi institutions in Early Sufism. In the early ages of Sufism, the Sufi's preach their students or seekers in the mosques, similar to other Islamic scholars, taught the Quran, *Tafsir* of Quran, and Islamic jurisprudence Sunnah. The early Sufis cannot be separated from other Islamic scholars, but because of Sufism's exclusive concept about the techniques they practice and the teaching that evolved with time, the need to have separate physical institutions was built without abandoning the role of the mosque. Many early Sufi masters taught from their homes and even from their shop². Sufis encouraged the idea of traveling and thought it is essential and a need for a place to stay during traveling and visiting Sufis. When Sufis had their separate places from other religious places like mosque or madrasas, it becomes easy for Sufis to develop a system or order and organized themselves according to the teachings of their Sufi masters.

The first separate independent Sufi institution was established as a small house or convent named Sufi Duwayrah by some early Sufi master Abd al-Wahid bin Zayd (d. 150 AH/767 CE). The Duwayrah

functioned as multipurpose gathering spaces and shelters for the Sufis, their followers and believers. The Duwayrah was built next to the mosque mostly. After Duwayrah, there were Ribats, which function as Sufi culture centers for worship. These centers temporarily lodged the followers and travelers as per the users' needs inside the structures. Ribat structure is a type of Arabic military fortified structure; Ribat in the Arabic language means to battle against the enemy. Thus, Ribat involves the constant struggles to purify one's soul and battle against oneself. Mosques and Sufi institutions were physically separated, but they were connected spiritually. Both structures have a similar vision and goals. Sufis isolated himself from society and vowed to stay isolated for forty days, to worship Allah.

After the Ribat, Khanqah emerges as a new and most recognizable institution for Sufis. It is educational, religious and cultural centers for Sufis. The evolution of Sufi institutions from mosques, Duwayrah, Ribats and Khanqahs are spontaneous; Ribat and Duwayrah are shelters for Sufis or have dwelled for Sufi masters where worship and learning activities were conducted. Later, Sufi institutions becoming more sophisticated and defining their orders and tariqa, which separate them from other Islamic scholars. Khanqahs function as religious, social, and educational centers, where Ribat functioned as lodges or hostels. The term Khanqah is made up of two Persian words *khanā-gah* which means "a place of residence" for the Sufis, a "place at the table" or a "place of recitation". Khanqah was an independent religious building that contains self-sufficient programs, which include hostels for the seekers, meeting spaces, library, socialization space, a madrasah or a school, mosque, which is one of the essential elements, with all other services and facilities.(Omer, 2014).



Figure 2 Curricula of activities in the Khanqahs, Source: Author

² Dawud bin Nasir al-Ta'i (d. 165 AH/781 CE) separated himself from the other house members and performs the act of devotion. Al-Junayd al-Baghdadi (d. 297 AH/910 CE) came to his shop, closed the door and perform four hundred Rakat (unit of prayer) every day. Another example is a Sufi master Ahmad Muhammad al-Nuri (d. 295 AH/908 CE) from Baghdad. He left the house with

some bread, hungry or needy people, entered the mosque, and then shop and fast for Allah SWT. He practiced this for almost 20 years (Omer, 2014). This is how the practices of Sufis evolved from mosques to their houses and shop and thus create a need for separate Sufi institutions (Omer, 2014).

3.2: Sufism in Pakistan

Pakistan is a culturally rich country in terms of language, architecture, culture, rituals, activities and has been known for being packed with shrines and Sufis. With increasing numbers in shrines, the Sufis are also in a considerable number. Sufism contradicts materialism (the idea of competition, desire and individualism) by providing teachings of harmony, peace and love (Bilqies, 2014). Sufism's journey begins with withdrawal from the material world in which one is drowning (Bakhtiar, 1976). Hazrat Ali Hajvery, famously known as Data Sahib, came with the same Message in Lahore, Pakistan. Now His Shrine turns out to be a different place concerning its customs and rituals performed by millions of followers. The spread of Islam in the subcontinent region is accredited to Sufis's efforts,

who travel from around the world (the Middle East, Persia, Subcontinent, etc.). Pakistan also came into being because of the Sufis as Sufis migrated into Hindu majority areas and spread Islam's Message. Such as Syed Ahmad Andrabi (d.A.H.804/A. D,1401) was the first Andrabi to enter in Kashmir valley. Sultan Qutubu' d-din was impressed by his teachings and constructed a Khanqah for him at Malaratta Srinagar, known by Khanqahi Andrabia. (Dr. Syed Damsaz Ali Andrabi, June 2017). Throughout the researchers did in-depth studies about the old Khanqahi structures (Khanum, 2006) but some studies have been made on contemporary Khanqahi structures in Pakistan and their political, religious and economic roles. There are four major orders of Sufism in Pakistan; their founders came from different eras, as mentioned in Table-1.

CHISTIYYA ORDER	NAQSHBANDI ORDER	QADRRIYA ORDER	SUHARWARDI ORDER
Founded by Moinud din Chishti	Founded by Bahaud Din Naqshbandi	Founded by Abdul Qadir Jilani	Founded by Sufi dia al-din Abu- Nijab
From Afghanistan 1195	From Turkistan 1370	From Baghdad	Originated from Iran
Absorbed ideas from Hindu bhaktis	Rigid adherence to Shariah	Leadership is not centralized. He adopts its interpretation and practices	It is strictly Sunni order, guided by the Shafi school of Islamic law

Table-1: Sufis orders in Pakistan

3.3: SUFISM AND ARCHITECTURE:

Sufism represents spiritual life of Islam. The word spirituality gets from spirit. Spirit is considered as opposed to matter, commonly used to define intangible things that lack a straightforward explanation. Spirituality can be found in music, nature, art, poetry and architecture. Spirits are immaterial beings without a body; in this sense, what is not material would be something without a body and would be viewed as profound. Something is spiritual if it has the presence of spirit in it. Spirituality is the dimension that vulnerable to specific measures. People can be genuinely spiritual if there is a sign of marked activity of spirit in them. The spirit can achieve awareness in the wake of being through the countless creature and human lives (Bakhtiar, 1976). Architecture can evoke a sense of numinous or even act as a medium between God and humans. The formation of unity and wholeness in such a revealing pattern could generate religious quality since these qualities are interpreted as the unity and oneness of God. Spirituality and emotions are some of the essential qualities that can

express through architecture. These qualities and the spaces that exhibit them also play an essential role in our existence.

The Sufis practicing spirituality are often depriving of those physical qualities in their architecture. Our culture revolves around religion, whose tangible factors can also be understood by looking at our mosques, madrasas and Khanqah and their architecture. However, unfortunately, we gradually lost those buildings' real essence, especially with Sufis' institutions. Sufi's institutions served as a center of learning, a learning that cannot be found in books or literature, but it's a discovery by a person itself with the help of Master. Those institutions served as a center in which the seeker could achieve the highest form of knowledge. The achievement requires purification of the soul as well as of the mind.

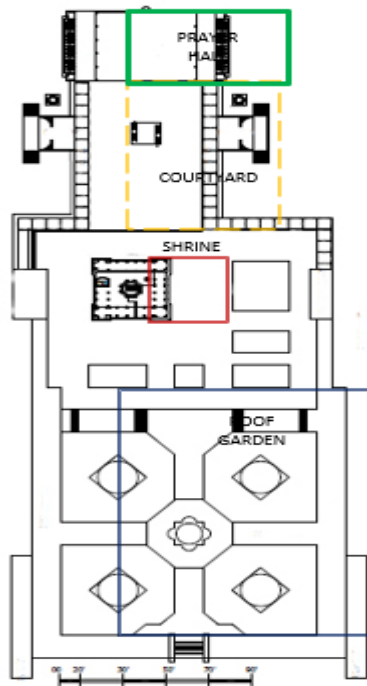
IV: COMPARISON BETWEEN SHRINE AND KHANQAH AND MODERN IDARAS

- **DATA DARBAR COMPLEX, LAHORE**
 Hazrat Ali Hujwiri, commonly known as Hazrat Data Gunj Baksh, his shrine is considered one of the

earliest memorials of the subcontinent. The shrine is located in front of the Bhatti gate walled city of Lahore. The number of visitors exceeds thirty thousand on weekdays and more than 60 thousand on Thursdays and Fridays (GHAFOOR, April, 2010). During the late quarter 20th century, the shrine of Data Gunj Baksh expanded immensely as its premises expanded from 6 Kanal to fifty-eight Kanal. The first expansion in 1981 included a new

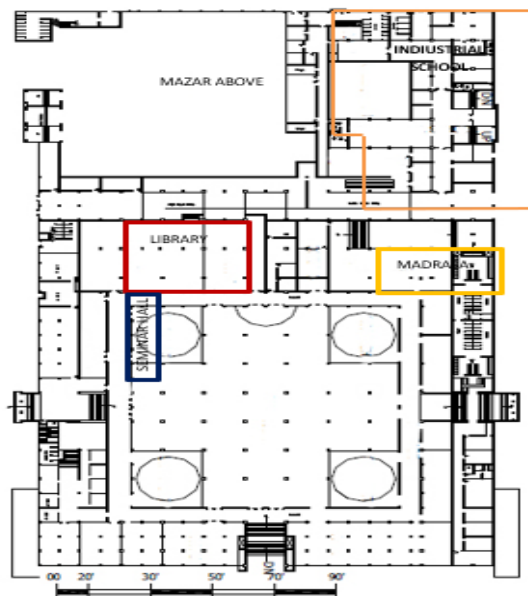
mosque with the shrine and verandah. In the second expansion, the Islamiyah school of Bhatti gate and Bahawalpur mosque were demolished. Shrine expanded horizontally and vertically with different levels, including basement with 5000 sitting capacity, parking for 200 cars, a library, school, vocational institute for women, double-story mosque, madrasa, and seminar hall (GHAFOOR, April, 2010).

Figure 3 GROUND FLOOR OF DATA DARBAR COMPLEX



SOURCE: (GHAFOOR, April, 2010)

Figure 4 LOWER GROUND FLOOR PLAN OF DATA DARBAR COMPLEX



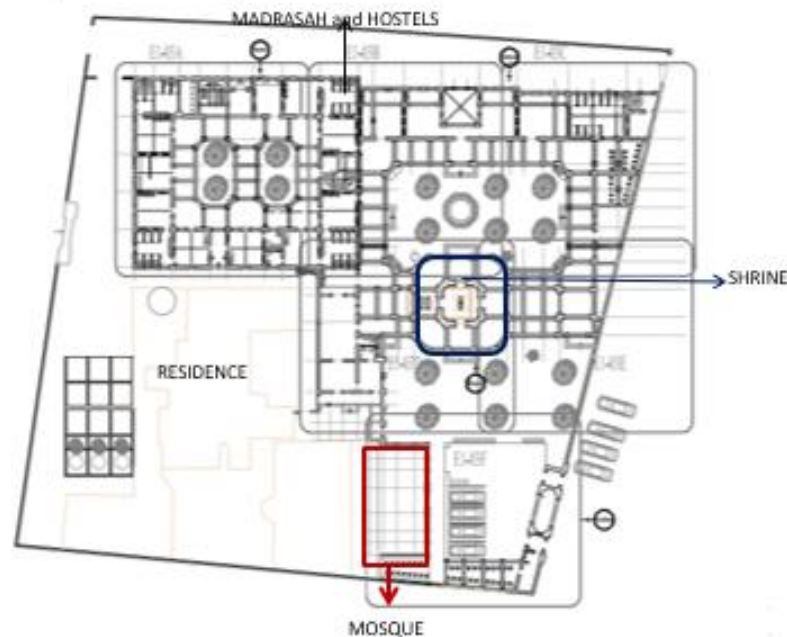
SOURCE (GHAFOOR, April, 2010)

• **DAR-UL-ISLAM KHANQAH**

Khanqah Dar-us-Salam is a Sufi institution that belongs to the Naqshbandiya order. Khanqah Dar us-Salam is situated on the outskirts of Sheikhpura and was inaugurated in 1964. The effort of the Khanqah is to serve humanity by helping seekers actively and non-seekers alike grasp the fundamentals of the Message brought by the final messenger Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H). The

Khanqah was later designed by Kamil Khan Mumtaz Architects, which was under construction. The design is based on the geometric proportions that regulate patterns based on mathematical ratios as influential in understanding the universe, man, and nature. The programs included in contemporary Khanqah are madrasa, mosque, a hostel for the seekers, the residence of Sufi, Shrine and central courtyards.

Figure 5 PLAN OF KHANQAH DAR-UL-ISLAM



SOURCE: KAMIL KHAN MUMTAZ ARCHITECTS

Previous research aims to understand the difference between shrine and Khanqah, Data Darbar Complex, which is the example for the shrine, Khanqahs, that includes Dara-us-Salam Khanqah Sheikhpura. As a result, the proposal was generated as a design strategy for the proposed design in the Lahore site on Karbath village, situated at Bedian road (outskirts of Lahore) as a reference study.

Conclusion

1. Spiritual Synthesis in Design

Sufi mysticism fundamentally transforms architecture into a medium of sacred realism, where physical structures embody spiritual and metaphysical principles. This synthesis reflects the Sufi pursuit of divine unity (Tawhid), merging material form with transcendent meaning to create spaces that bridge the earthly and the divine.

2. Symbolism and Sacred Geometry

Architectural elements such as intricate geometric patterns, calligraphy, and the interplay of light and shadow serve as symbolic expressions of Sufi cosmology. These features articulate the infinite nature of creation, the interconnectedness of existence, and the illumination of divine wisdom, fostering environments conducive to contemplation and spiritual awakening.

3. Cultural and Historical Manifestations

Landmarks like the Alhambra, Süleymaniye Mosque, and Kashmiri Khanqahs demonstrate how Sufi principles adapted to diverse cultural contexts. These structures harmonize aesthetic grandeur with spiritual functionality, integrating Quranic verses, Sufi poetry, and regionally inspired designs to create universal sanctuaries for worship and introspection.

4. Architecture as Spiritual Practice

Sufi-influenced architecture transcends utilitarian purpose, becoming a dynamic participant in the devotee's spiritual journey. Through spatial organization, domes symbolizing celestial realms, and ethereal atmospheres, these spaces act as gateways to divine communion, prioritizing inner experience over mere outward ritual.

5. Legacy of Transcendent Unity

By infusing buildings with metaphysical intentionality, Sufi mysticism redefines architecture as a living expression of cosmic order and divine love. This legacy underscores the potential of sacred spaces to elevate human consciousness, uniting beauty, faith, and philosophy into a cohesive vision of unity in diversity.

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